had come to the ears of Lieutenant-Colonel P. T. Etherton, local British Consul-General and Political Resident, who made haste to point out "that the advantages to be gained were out of all proportion to the danger incurred. . . ." The Titai is said to have agreed, the Russians are said to have been "checkmated," and (unsaid) the industrial development of Kashgar was retarded for another stretch of years. This is a sample of the sort of thing that has long been holding back Sinkiang development.

Yet it is doubtful whether the tribesmen of the Sinkiang steppes and oases spent much time yearning for progress as such. They clung to their time-honored ways, and a thousand years more or less seemed to bring little change or concern. For Sinkiang did have color and charm —charm especially of a human, a warm temperament. A perfect host might sometimes put his wife or pretty daughter at the disposal of an overnight guest but paradoxically the modesty of a woman was protected by a face veil. A wealthy khan might expand his harem until it almost rivaled that of Yakub Beg, self-made "King of Kashgar," who maintained three hundred favorites in state and always took at least four with him on his trips to outlying areas. At Sinkiang merry-makings, as befitted a nomad's paradise, mare's milk was quaffed with gusto and horse meat was regarded an expensive luxury. A fortune-teller was always ready to deal out prosperity for the throng of a local bazaar; somewhere near by a tambourine would jingle merrily; and a samovar was usually singing its own happy song. Uighur, Mongol, Kazakh, and Son of Han, all and more, mingled, yet maintained their own traditions; and religion ran the gamut—from Mohammedanism, Lamaist Buddhism, and ancient Manichaeism to Christianity.

But in the old Sinkiang, as has too often been the case elsewhere, along with the enchanting and the bizarre there were poverty, cruelty, and crime. The Sinkiang peasant in most cases made his home in a dirty, mud-wood hovel or, on the steppe, in a primitive, tent-like abode. It was at times hard going for him to scrape up enough food on which to feed himself and his family, and often he took to begging and to thievery, only to be apportioned harsh punishment. It was not unusual for a servant, caught stealing, to have his fingers or part of his tongue

cut off. A magistrate of former days, who was angrily aroused by the unusual number of crimes in his district, had all the suspected criminals rounded up and then, merely as a precaution, ordered the tendons of their ankles slit. A murderer once was allotted a terrible punishment. Stripped naked under a hot sun, he was thrown to the hard earth of a compound yard and fastened there with wooden pegs driven through his body. His torturers then secured a live rat under an inverted pot on his mid-section, and left him to die while the sun's rays beat down upon him and the rat ate through his abdomen. Almost as horrifying is the case of the Moslem who came upon his wife with her face unveiled talking across the compound wall to a male neighbor. The husband immediately drew his sword and cut off her head. Throwing it over the wall, he told the neighbor that he could thenceforth have her for good.

Political corruption, too, in former days was rife. The tax burden on the common man was unbearable, and officialdom squeezed for selfish gain. Tax methods were irregular and, since they usually varied from locality to locality, systematic check was difficult. On paper an official would report that he was maintaining a strong force of military but, actually pocketing the monetary difference out of his budget, would only keep about him a fraction of the number of troops reported. Nepotism was commonly practiced and, even if the ugly truth concerning some particular instance did come to public attention, usually little was done about it. Since Han Chinese officials were a small minority and since the people whom they were governing were strange in language and customs, native headmen often obtained important intermediate posts by which they, too, kept their pockets illicitly lined.

Out of this paradoxically alluring and yet repellent atmosphere came finally the Sinkiang uprising of the 1930's and the emergence of a young, well-educated Manchurian Chinese leader by the name of Sheng Shih-ts'ai.

3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

had formally requested the Taoyin, and through him their Magistrate, to make inquiries into the whereabouts of a British subject last heard of in Yangi Hissar district. This meant that unless they, the Beg, headmen and people of the Kinkol valley, could either find the fellow or prove that he had crossed the passes into Tashkurghan district, unpleasant things would happen to them.

It was not long before the suspicions of the headmen fell upon our friend Yakub. The latter at first strenuously denied all knowledge of the missing man ; but he failed to explain how he had become so wealthy all of a sudden, and eventually he confessed. Let us not inquire too closely into the methods by which the Beg and his minions persuaded Yakub to be frank with them. Suffice it to say that according to the old Chinese law still in force in Sinkiang no one can be convicted of any crime, no matter how strong the evidence against him may be, unless he confesses it ; so that those responsible for the suppression of crime become experts in the fine art of eliciting confessions from recalcitrant prisoners. From the point of view of the British Consulate-General, all that mattered was that Yakub gave Mr. Chang and myself a detailed and even graphic account of how he did the deed, so that Chinese justice could take its course, the claims of Muhammad Shah's relatives in far Chitral be duly honoured and the bonds of amity between two great nations further strengthened through their local representatives. True, the said relatives of the deceased not only received no blood-money, as they would have done if he had waited till he reached his own country before getting himself murdered, but had to be content with a mere fraction of his estate—for the local people who had had so much trouble and anxiety over the matter, from the Beg down to the prisoner's (more or less) innocent wife, could not be expected to disgorge more than a reasonable percentage of the spoils. But then, Muhammad Shah had no business to indulge in opium-running in Chinese territory. With my concurrence, the Magistrate found Yakub guilty of murder and condemned him to death ; six weeks later, when the necessary confirmation had been received from the Governor at Urumchi, the murderer was duly hanged in the presence of the British Aqsaqal of Yangi Hissar.

To return to our own journey. Soon after midday, when the trial was over, a cloth was laid on the Court table and the Magistrate and I seized our chop-sticks and set to work on a regular Yamen dinner of about twenty-five courses which